

Experiments in uncertainty: ambivalence and alterity as productive encounters in design education

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Category of abstract from diagram I : Education (3)

This paper reflects on the integration of dialogic ambivalence in the process of design, specifically within the pedagogy of the architectural project. It discusses how the destabilisation of established and learned methods, as well as transpositions between genres, are dialogic encounters that can become productive tropes for students and their projects. These encounters are not only interesting in the way they keep the space of the project open and purposely out-of-control (both in its production and its products), but also with respect to the development of the students' own understanding of themselves as subjects-in-project (what Alain Findeli defined as *l'homme-en-projet*).

The empirical context of this paper consists of two separate fourth-year undergraduate design studios that took place at the Carleton University School of Architecture in Ottawa, Canada, in the winters of 2014 and 2015. The brief for each studio was developed as a way to integrate my own research on the application of Bakhtinian concepts in architecture and design, dealing particularly with the process of conceiving the assemblage of the public realm, the articulation of social structures and forms in relation to everyday reality, as well as the process of dialogically working through a design problem – whether collaborative or individual. The studios used the concepts of dialogue, ambivalence, alterity and the carnival to encourage a critical reformulation of methods learned in previous years. Each student was encouraged to develop their own approach to the project so that they would be faced with risk and uncertainty about its potential outcome. The studios were also predicated on a series of genre-transpositions exercises in creative writing, drawing, modelling and installation work. This was, as William Whyte has argued, so that the meaning of each project would be found not in the finished product, but in the moments of translations where things are gained and lost, and our control as authors is not completely our own.

As Gilles Deleuze has said about writing, design follows lines of flight that reinforce its exploratory and exotopic aspects. The subject-in-project, following these lines that may lead to things unpredicted, unforeseen and potentially uncomfortable, is momentarily destabilised. The development of the project through uncertainty does not only render us partially myopic with regards to safe and controlled outcomes, but confronts us with a process that is altering. Through an examination of the studio process and the work developed by the students, student testimonies and the concepts that framed the studio's pedagogical approach, the paper discusses the interest of working through uncertain ways to alter both project and subject. It suggests that the understandings and discoveries encountered in such a process are ways to productively link design education to the architectonics of knowledge production as both an individual and a social collective project.